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ABSTRACT

Physical disability is an enormous psychosocio-economic-medical problem that affects over 24 million Americans. Public policy endorses a multi-disciplinary approach in analyzing this issue. Legislation has broadened the meaning of physical disability to include persons with mental and emotional disorders. Some of the costs associated with physical disability include limited or no participation in the labor market, social isolation, a reduction in national income, loss of productivity, and a reduction of household employment. A human resources approach for assisting the physically disabled incorporates an efficient allocation of public and private resources for elementary, secondary, technical and college education; a job upon completion of one's education; counseling; transportation; medical services; and individualized services. The elimination of architectural barriers will enhance employment opportunities for rehabilitants. Cost-benefit studies verify and support an expansion of government programs to prepare the physically disabled for future life-self-fulfillment. On-the-job training, specialized vocational programs, and bio-engineering adaptions of jobs have increased the productivity and employment opportunities for well-trained, homebound, and other severely disabled persons. Employment in captive markets, and sheltered workshops can be improved through the adoption of modern marketing procedures. Moreover, well-trained clients are successful in providing their own job placement. (Author)

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RECOGNIZING PHYSICAL DISABILITY AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

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Disability is an enormous psychosocio-economic and medical problem for over 24 million[1] Americans. Many of these individuals are unable to participate in gainful employment, or have a limited capacity to be involved in a major activity in our community. Some of the handicapped are incapable of participating in domestic employment or in limited activity. In the spring of 1970, there were 4.7 million disabled pupils with handicaps enrolled in the public schools.[2] Thus, the costs of disability to the handicapped person, to those who care for the disabled, to the economy, and to the tax payer is a prodigious problem.

This paper examines the role of public institutions in assisting handicapped persons to achieve self-sufficiency. Economic and psychological costs of disability are explored. A human resources approach is suggested in meeting the future needs of the handicapped in our society. The job experience of handicapped workers reveals that the disabled are very competent employees.

The evolution of public policy for the handicapped person in the United States reflects a humanitarian approach in supporting their medical, psychological, and economic needs. Gradually, public and private agencies have assumed the financial and administrative leadership in developing educational and medical programs for the disabled in our society. The American Federation of the Physically Handicapped has led the way in eliciting national concern and legislative support for government expenditures on rehabilitation programs. In addition, social scientists have recently recognized that investments in human capital can contribute toward the development of man's skills and enrich his contribution to society.

Public policy has been designed to restore the disabled person to a productive and creative role in society. Beginning with the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, federal and state funds have been allocated to provide medical and vocational services for the disabled. During the Great Depression, many states reduced their contributions to rehabilitation programs and called upon the federal government to assume a larger share of the cost. Rehabilitation was given a new emphasis in 1943, when Congress established the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation[3] (OVA) to administer programs for the disabled. Another milestone took place in 1965, when the OVA was given a mandate to provide the disabled with larger payments, construct rehabilitation centers, improve the information on disability, and begin to remove architectural barriers[4]. Congress has continued to broaden the scope and authority of programs for the disabled. "Inreased emphasis must be placed on an individual case-by-case total approach in recruiting, counseling, training, and placement of disadvantaged youth and adults."[5] The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 broadened the scope of services to include emotional and mental disorders, youthful offenders, parolees, and the disadvantaged who lose their job in the labor market because of age, prejudices, sex, or lack of skill.

The Costs of Disability.

Social and rehabilitation services for handicapped persons have evolved very slowly in the western world. Discrimination against the disabled is indicated by 1) restrictions on their participation in many jobs; and 2) societies' refusal to interact with them, whereby the disabled would be integrated into the"normal" society.[6]

Social isolation is a cost that handicapped persons experience. Social psychologists have shown that the disabled, when attempting to integrate with the nondisabled have not always been accepted into the "normal" society. The disabled are often referred to as "deviants" or "minorities". They experience a limited amount of interaction in social, leisure, and even in university activities with the nondisabled. Hunt, however, shows that the disabled, desire full integration with the nondisabled at all levels of life.[7]

The incidence of disability lowers the level of national income in our society. Aggregate employment is decreased by the potential output of disabled persons who cannot participate in gainful employment. Absenteeism creates intermittent or extended loss of income to the individual. In addition, productivity declines when a handicapped person works part-time or is required to withdraw from the labor force. Another leakage to the national income occurs when an employable person does not work or withdraws from the labor force to assist a disabled person with their personal needs.

Disability forces some individuals to enter the labor market to pay for disability expenses. National output is increased when a member of the family begins working, however, the working housewife has to curtail many of her household activities. Employment of domestic workers will increase as their services are demanded. Moreover, expenditures on the disabled do not result in a "net social cost"[8] since the disabled gain through the use of the services.

Some of the costs associated with disability may not be realized until later in life. Parents with chronic handicaps may not provide for their children's education or give adequate attention to their emotional development. Acute disability problems may lower an individual's aiblity to save, and the aggregation of capital may decline. Accidents can create property losses, personal injury, and can result in a withdrawal from normal life.

A Human Resources Approach.

Our research, policies, and programs for the handicapped, as well as for all human beings should be focused upon the development of human resources and not upon the acquisition of material wealth. If we pursue the G.N.P. approach which opts for larger annual increases in economic growth, we will tend to overlook the importance of the individual who is unemployed or underemployed. When the economy is functioning at less than full employment, economic growth emphasizes increased expenditures by consumers, private investors, and government to create new job opportunities. It is assumed that dispersions in the distribution of income or opportunities to enter the labor market will disappear over time. Benefit-cost analysis, which is used to some extent in deciding upon the allocation of investments for human capital, may suggest to social planners to disregard some educational programs for the disabled.

A human resources philosophy for the handicapped would encompass an efficient allocation of public and private resources for educational programs. In addition, adequate employment opportunities would be available for the rehabilitated in the labor market. Expenditures for developing

human capital should begin, if necessary, prior to entering elementary school. Vocational training, specialized manpower programs, adult education, and graduate and professional schools should be made available for those who are qualified to pursue advanced knowledge. Every effort should be made to assist the individual to acquire knowledge and to develop skills for gainful employment. Research would have to identify the problems associated with different types of disability and recommend goals and alternative programs which could be achieved within the resources allocated for these purposes.

Education, whether it be collegiate or vocational, will increase the opportunities for the disabled person to develop and participate in a life vocation. The development of specific handicapped services and educational facilities will enhance the economic independence for the disabled in our society. Counseling, individualized services, medical facilities, transportation, and specialized educational programs will contribute toward improving the handicapped person's ability to become self-sufficient. Even though countries with the most advanced medical and social programs have improved the means for the disabled to achieve independence, research indicates that self-sufficiency has not been advanced a great deal.

The economic benefits of vocational rehabilitation programs indicate that many handicapped persons can become self-supporting. Conley's[9] studies reveal that recipients of rehabilitation programs have increased their earnings by 2½ to 6 times their previous income. A recent study of rehabilitants in Tenessee[10] showed that the mean income increased from $10.54 a week to a mean of $38.49 per week at closure. Moreover, only one male and

no females were unemployed at closure in the Tenessee study. The Wood County Project[11] in Wisconsin reported a benefit-cost ratio of approximately 70-1 for the culturally disadvantaged; a 40-1 benefit-cost ratio for the emotionally disturbed; and a 33-1 benefit-cost ratio for the physically handicapped. The cost-benefit ratio at the Job Development Laboratory for a five year period was 32.26. Successful closure is an important goal for each client who enters a rehabilitation program.

Educating the disabled person for the future life-self-fulfillment and employment in a rapidly changing technological environment is a challenging and enormous assignment at every level of our educational system. We must clearly recognize the nature of our responsibility as our society becomes more cybernated. During the past ten years, over 20 million jobs were eliminated by automation and other forms of technological change. Although our economy expanded during this period by providing a net gain in employment, the labor market did not create a job for every individual who was willing and able to work. Handicapped persons, in particular, continue to encounter many barriers in entering the labor force.

Preparing the disabled person for employment will have to place greater emphasis upon education for white-collar occupations. Occupational forecasts for the 1970's and for the longer period of time, clearly indicate a significant growth in professional and technical jobs in public and private sectors of our economy. This trend of occupational growth opens numerous employment opportunities for the handicapped persons, who by nature of their disability, were restricted from entering many blue-collared jobs.

Employment Experience.

Developing employment opportunities for the physically disabled required new approaches by counselors, institutions of higher learning, technical schools, and by public and private rehabilitation agencies. The experience of employers in hiring the homebound and other handicapped persons indicates that the disabled are active participants in our industrial society. New training programs have prepared numerous individuals for gainful employment.

Advancement of communication technology has the potential of providing new opportunities for the homebound and other handicapped persons. Data systems, cable television, and other technological developments on the horizon offer many new job options for the severely disabled person who tends to have limited mobility. As the post-industrial society emerges, man will become more involved in information processing functions and devote less time to handling physical inputs. Recent behavioral research on information technology indicates a possible reduction in alienation, increased autonomy for the individual, and a greater variety of work assignments. Experiments by Shworles[13] suggest that homebound handicapped persons can be utilized in a variety of new occupations associated with telecommunications. Application of the new technology would also reduce the intra-urban transportation needs.

The success of the Virginia Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center (WWRC), the International Business Machine Corporation, and the Center for Independent Living in California indicated the importance of community involvement and cooperation in

creating employment opportunities for the severely handicapped. Individuals who were carefully screened for their intellectual capability by the above institutions have been successfully trained in data processing.[14] Of the twelve individuals who completed the WWRC program, three are in homebound employment and the others are working in offices. All of the rehabilitants began their professional career immediately upon graduation. New course modules, standards of performance, skill levels, job development, and placement was resolved by the participating institutions.[15]

Career development in computer technology lends itself to handicapped persons who have completed a technical education in the field. Employment in computer sciences is flexible, and does not require extensive use of body motion, physical strength or endurance. New technology continues to create the need for individuals who desire to advance their skills and knowledge of systems analysis.

The homebound have been neglected by the professional worker and the agency. Currently, less than 5 percent of all homebound adults are actively enrolled in a rehabilitation program. This low involvement is attributed to " a surprisingly large number of professional workers believe that homebound people are not amenable to rehabilitation, are costly to serve, and/or cannot be accomodated within the boundaries of Federal and State rehabilitation legislation and procedures."[16] Although a lag exists in attitudinal values toward these potential clients, all homebound programs have successfully achieved their goals.

Job analysis is being used by the Job Development Laboratory[17] to place the severely handicapped in a wide variety of homebound and non-homebound

occupations. The productivity of the rehabilitants is as high if not higher than able-bodied persons in the same job. Mental and physical tests are administered to clients to determine what job tasks they can perform. The individual's home environment is evaluated to determine if the person can adapt to jobs in the labor market. Bio-engineering adaptions have been found to be effective in expanding the number of jobs the severely handicapped can work at.

On-the-job training is used by Hallmark Cards Inc.[18] to provide employment opportunities for the handicapped and disadvantaged persons. Selection of trainees is based on economic "need" and the desire of the client " to do a good job." The retention rate has been 52 percent for both groups over a 3 to 6 months training period. After completion of the training program, the rehabilitant is employed at the corporate headquarters plant.

"Captive" markets are being expanded to develop new employment opportunities for the severely handicapped worker. The National Industries for the Severely Handicapped (NISH) has enlarged its staff to serve more certified workshops. Several states including New York, Alabama and Florida have "set aside" production for the blind. Employment for the handicapped can be improved as federal and state programs adopt marketing techniques and train their clients with new skills.

Congress recently amended the Wagner-O'Day Act of 1938, in June, 1971 to improve employment opportunities for the severely handicapped and the blind.[19] The Committee for Purchase of Products and Services of the Blind and Other Severely Handicapped is to determine what goods and services are to be produced; the price of the items; and provide federal agencies a list of

items that can be purchased from all shops. This legislation has made it possible for the disabled to expand their production from household items and engage in new services, and manufacturing activities.

New and meaningful work opportunties could be provided for the disabled in this country by having Congress expand and improve the quality of sheltered workshops. Even though these shops are permitted to pay wages lower than the minimum wage, earnings and employment have not improved to encourage significa numbers of disabled persons to develop their skills. However, the recent successes in Denmark, England, Norway, and Belgium with sheltered workshops clearly indicate that the handicapped person can learn a variety of skills, increase their productivity, and earn a "full wage earning status."[20] Special rehabilitation centers provide individualized training, counseling, transportation, housing, and medical facilities for the trainees. Many of the disabled are eventually placed in private industry.

The findings of Goodyear and Stude[21] show that there was no significant difference between disabled and able-bodied employees on job performance at an Internal Revenue Service office. Job satisfaction was measured by starting and current salary levels, period of employment, self-ratings,and supervisor evaluation. Although the severely disabled were exempt from taking a Civil Service Examination for admission to employment, their work performance was at an "acceptable level." Job satisfaction was also found to be higher among the disabled, than the non-disabled employees. The handicapped are motivated to achieve self-sufficiency and independence, and to enjoy the rewards of work.

The future of workshops depends upon the adoption of modern marketing

techniques according to the Greenleigh's[22] study. Some workshops have already been successful in utilizing the power of marketing. Our highly competitive economy requires that all workshops utilize marketing managers to deal with all aspects of marketing. This approach is essential for the procurement of work from potential customers, subcontracting for industrial firms, which has been the major source of employment for workshops, is becoming increasingly competitive with the entry of marginal workers in the labor market. Product prices of goods produced in workshops are very competitive since they are sold in monopolistic markets. Thus, the survival of workshops is dependent upon their ability to market products in competitive markets.

The employment experience of the handicapped has demonstrated that the myths employers have concerning the disabled are unfounded.[23] Insurance costs have not increased as firms employed the handicapped according to studies by Du Pont, U. S. Chamber of Commerce, National Association of Manufacturers, and the National Conference Board. Rehabilitated employees are very flexible and capable of making adjustments at the work place. The removal of architectural barriers and modifications in the work area make it possible for the disabled to be very competitive. Safety records clearly show that the handicapped worker is very conscious of adhering to plant safety rules. The disabled also want to be treated as equals without any special compensation from their fellow employees. The work experience has also shown that able-bodied workers accept the handicapped employee as a member of the work team.

Disabled persons need to be informed of any medical requirements that potential employers use in selecting their employees. Collier's[24] study of diabetics, epileptics, and individuals with auditory and visual disabilities

indicates that some state board of education, colleges of education, and local school districts deny employment to individuals who have any of these medical problems. A thorough medical examination and up-to-date counseling would prevent a disabled person from pursuing a career where they are denied employment. Educational institutions and professional associations need to cooperate in informing and providing the disabled with academic programs that will lead to gainful employment.

Without political and moral support from civic leaders in the nation, it is difficult to improve and expand the scope of rehabilitation programs for the disabled. Astudy of service clubs revealed that "responsible community members do not know a great deal about vocational rehabilitation and a fairly comprehensive public education program does not change the situation appreciably."[25] Also the respondents did not have a clear understanding of different agencies who provide services for the disabled. The author recommends that new communication methods are important in providing information about the handicapped to "responsible community members," otherwise "it seems evident that state-federal agencies will continue to be handicapped in their efforts to help the handicapped."[26]

It is difficult to place a rehabilitated person in competitive employment when a counselor approaches an employer with a protective attitude.[27] Counselors who offer technical, psychological, and other supporting services to prospective employers fail to recognize that these offers are a hindrance to placement. Experience has shown that well-trained and qualified clients can sell their skills, personality, and character in the world of work without the guarantee of continued assistance from a rehabilitation agency. "Sympathetic negativism" can be broken when each handicapped person independently

applies for their own job.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, recognizes that if clients are to receive improved services, it is necessary to upgrade the quality of rehabilitation personnel in public and private agencies. In 1974, twelve Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Programs[28] (RRCEP) were established to provide post-employment training for rehabilitation staff. Each region is required to determine the training needs and to develop educational materials for its personnel. Counseling techniques are to be stressed in the curriculum. The regional agency is to coordinate medical, university, technical and other rehabilitation resources that are involved in servicing clients. This new focus on continuing education will emphasize an assessment of program goals and assist in meeting the needs of clients.

Conclusion

Although millions of handicapped persons have found new meaning to life and achieved self-sufficiency, there is a need to expand and to develop new rehabilitation programs for those individuals who have not become self-sufficient. The adoption of a human resources approach to rehabilitation will assist in achieving this goal.

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